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Written statement* submitted by People for Successful Corean Reunification, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is hereby circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[21 February 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Child Labour within the DPRK

This statement highlights some particular concerns with regard to child labour in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Recently, the U.N. has tightened economic sanctions on the DPRK in response to its nuclear program. Furthermore, the U.N. and countries all over the world have condemned DPRK forced labour abroad. However laudable these progressions are, we want to raise some serious concerns regarding child labour within the DPRK. This issue is still largely unnoticed, yet the children's rights situation within the country is shocking.

Child Labour in the DPRK

In our most recent report, *Unending Toil: Child Labour within North Korea*, we have systematically described the child labour practices in the DPRK using multiple defector testimonies. Although officially DPRK laws prohibit child labour, in practice these laws are not enforced. There are several channels through which children are forced to work, but the education system is the main enforcer. Thus, the abuse of children's rights in the DPRK is systematic and grounded in its educational culture.

In its legislation, the DPRK aims to provide quality education for all its children. However, the educational quality is poor, partly because children are required to work so much. Child labour has its deepest roots in the educational system. It is often disguised by state ideology and presented as a way for children to help their nation.

The most common and invasive form of systematized child labour is the *Agricultural Labour Support*. This refers to mobilizing children to work on farms. As the DPRK is largely an agricultural autarky, the government needs the help of children to produce its own necessities. School-going children are thus required, as part of their school curriculum, to work on farms after school hours for the *Local Agricultural Labour Support*. This usually means that children spend their afternoon working on a nearby farm, harvesting and planting grains. At first, the students are told that it is only temporary, but in reality, they are always required to work. However, there is a difference between urban and rural areas. In rural areas, the burden on children is larger.

Furthermore, once or twice per year high school students are required to leave their school and work on a farm full-time for the *Long-term Agricultural Labour Support*. When the harvesting season arrives, children need to leave their hometown to stay on a farm for a month. During this time, they receive no education and are required to work from dawn to dusk. This is arduous and often harmful to their health and academic development. The work is often extremely hard on the children. In one of the testimonies, a defector, Koo Dong-su, stated "Everyone was very exhausted. I hated this period the most. I cried and told my mom on the phone that I wanted to go back home, but I couldn't help but to stay and work because I didn't have money."

Another form of systematized child labour in the DPRK is the *Children's Initiative*. This refers to assignments given to children by the government, through the education system. The initiative demands children to collect certain items, such as scrap iron, paper, rabbit hide, etc. These items are often hard to collect, and children have to search long and in difficult places to find them. This places them in dangerous situations. Furthermore, all of this is done in their free time. Failure to deliver these items will result in bodily and mental punishments. Besides the *Children's Initiative*, the school also often demands items. The government is supposed to ensure that schools have all things necessary to run smoothly, but as the government fails to do so, the school tasks children to find the necessary products.

Besides item collections and *Agricultural Labour Support*, schools mobilize its children in many more ways to do certain forms of labour. For example, children are expected to help in construction projects. These projects are often dangerous and extremely unsuitable for children. Children also have to participate in mass games, birthday and mourning ceremonies, propaganda campaigns, political events and many other forms of disguised child labour. Parents, teachers and students alike have accepted that this is part of their educational system.

Although the education system provides for most of the child labour, prison camps, orphanages and relief shelters also systematically put children to work. According to the DPRK government, the prison camps do not exist. However, defector testimonies and satellite images show differently. Children in the prison camps are brought into these camps by guilt-by-association and are treated with particular cruelty. The prison camps provide education, but the quality is poor.

Furthermore, children in prison camps are mainly seen as labour resources and used as such. They have to collect items but in far greater amounts than their school-going counterparts. On top of that, there is not enough food in the prison camps, so the children are forced to look for their own food as well. In a testimony, defector Han Chul-min stated: "We lost several classmates from fatal falls or other accidents. I'm sure it was the same in other schools. A lot of children died, but no one cared."

Orphanages provide a place to live for children who have lost both parents. What should be a place of care, is more a place of terror for these children. They are extremely malnourished, receive low-quality education, are abused by their caretakers and, on top of all that, also have to work extremely hard. Relief shelters, which are basically makeshift orphanages, are even harsher. Children do not receive education and instead are required to work full-time. It is not uncommon that children in orphanages, relief shelters or detention centres have to perform manual labour tasks such as brick production or making parts for jewellery.

The DPRK's Fifth State Report to the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child

As the DPRK has signed and ratified the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child, it had to prepare a report on its children's rights situation It released this report on May 13, 2016. This report sketches a picture of the DPRK providing proper care and rights for its children and describes none of the practices mentioned above. Through many defector testimonies, we can deduct that the DPRK report contains falsehoods. We strongly urge the UN to revise its idea of the children's rights situation in the DPRK and to consider the testimonies we provided.

Recommendations

As becomes clear from our report, children do not enjoy basic human rights in the DPRK. The government is more preoccupied with maintaining its dictatorship that with taking care of its citizens. Due to a serious lack of both material and labour resources, the government needs to employ children to maintain its current position. This violates the children's rights in several ways. Firstly, because the work is arduous and has to be performed during and after school, children do not receive the education they deserve. Secondly, the work performed is often unsuitable for children and places them in dangerous situations. Thirdly, children undergo physical and mental abuse if they fail to comply with the labour required from them.

PSCORE strongly urges the international community to work towards eradicating child labour practices in the DPRK. We believe there are several things that can be done. Firstly, it is vital that the United Nations and its member states strongly demand from the DPRK to end its human rights' abuses. The human rights' issue should be prioritized by countries when making decisions regarding the DPRK. Secondly, the current human rights' situation in the DPRK needs to be communicated to a wider audience. Thirdly, although the DPRK is not one of the member states of the ILO, the ILO should realize how the DPRK systematically ignores the international standards on child labour. Finally, we recommend that, in order for the DPRK to truly improve their human rights' situation, third-party experts should evaluate the progress made.

Currently, there are economic sanctions placed on the DPRK due to the rising nuclear threat. Although these sanctions might prove effective in this area, we fear that they might have negative consequences on child labour. As more economic support is cut off from the DPRK, the government will have to rely even more on children to provide its basic necessities. If we do not pressure the DPRK into improving its children's rights situation, more sanctions will only lead to more exploitation. Humanitarian aid is often ineffective as it does not arrive at the places where it is needed most.

The child labour situation in the DPRK comes from its social structure. The DPRK government promotes an oppressive state ideology which demands children to work for their country. The government and its supreme leader should take responsibility for their actions against children's rights. They need to protect their new generation, not exploit them. We call on all member states to urge the DPRK to respect the rights of its children and to end child labour practices.